

i. ORAL EROTISM AND SADISM

The incidents I have been able to bring together offer a clear if fragmentary illustration of the general theme of oral erotism and aggression.

The children's direct pleasure in the more primitive activities of the mouth, whether sucking fingers or other objects, spitting, or making bubbling noises when drinking, is very plain. How great this pleasure is can be observed in every young infant and most children under three or four years. There are few who do not show some reluctance to give it up, and, for instance, to conform to accepted modes of eating and drinking. Thumb or finger sucking is of course the most frequent mode of persistent oral pleasure in children, and so widespread and familiar that I need say nothing more about its occurrence. It forms one of the commonest "problems" of early training, as is seen in my table of difficulties on p. 27. (Of the children in the Malting House School, Frank would obviously be accounted one of the "difficult" children in this regard.)

What is the nature of the pleasure which the child gains from thumb-sucking or his bubbling noises with a cup of water? The answer to this is not a simple one.

In the first place, I have already spoken sufficiently of the grounds for regarding it as essentially sexual in character. In some respects this is clear to ordinary observation, since at least some of the oral elements in the sexual life commonly escape repression. The mutual approximation of oral zones—which we call kissing, for example, remains (with a large part of the human race) an integral part of the normal and permitted sexual approach. It is true that kissing is also a recognised mode of showing affection in those relationships which as far as consciousness is concerned are not felt to be

sexual. Psycho-analytic studies, however, have shown that these tender disinterested loves are genetically continuous in individual mental history with the early sensual affections of the infant, the sexual aim having become inhibited and the sexual feeling deeply repressed into the unconscious levels of the mind.

The earliest and prototypic pleasure of the mouth is of course satisfaction at the mother's breast. The breast brings to the child deep sensory satisfaction and the comfort